

News Release

For Immediate Release

Date: September 11, 1998

Contact: [Robert Lesley](#) (601) 359-1135

MS, LA AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONERS ASK CONGRESS FOR DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

(Jackson, MS) Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture Lester Spell and Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom are calling on congress to help farmers who have been hit hard by the 1998 drought. The two commissioners have returned from Washington D.C. where they met with members of the Mississippi and Louisiana congressional delegations and their staff to point out specific needs in the two states.

“This year’s drought has led to a loss of production in Mississippi’s major row and grain crops,” said Spell. “The dry weather has also promoted other problems such as a severe infestation of aflatoxin, a fungus that has damaged approximately 65% of Mississippi’s corn crop, resulting in extreme economic losses for the farmer.”

Commissioner Spell told congressional representatives that other agricultural interests in Mississippi had also been hit by the weather. Many of the state’s poultry growers suffered heavy losses due to the heat and tree farmers who planted pine seedlings in late 1997 and early 1998 had experienced higher than normal losses due to drought. Poultry and timber are the number one and number two commodities in Mississippi. Spell asked that the cost of replanting seedlings be covered in drought relief legislation and also stressed the drought’s impact on beef and dairy producers and pastureland in Mississippi.

Both Spell and Odom expressed opposition to a proposal that would limit disaster funds to farmers who have crop insurance and who have collected for crop damages for 3 of the last 5 years. “Some of the Mississippi farmers who suffered major losses because of the severe drought do not have crop insurance,” Spell said. He added that 1996 and 1997 had been relatively good production years for Mississippi farmers, which would hamper their attempt to get financial help under the proposed plan.

(More)

Commissioner Spell said that both Mississippi and Louisiana could lose a high number of farmers this year due to harsh weather and low crop prices. Spell pointed out that because of the efficiency of our farmers, only about 10 cents out of dollar spent by Americans goes to purchase food. “If Americans expect to continue to have an abundant supply of safe, low cost food,” said Spell, “the economic survival of the American farmer is essential.”

Congress is expected to be dealing with the farm crisis during the next several weeks.